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BABEUF: A COMMUNIST IN A NON-COMMUNIST CONSPIRACY

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INTRODUCTION

On May 4, 1796, a detachment of soldiers from the guard of the Directory entered the home of Tissot, a tailor, and arrested those present for conspiracy to overthrow the French Government. One of these men was Philippe Buonarroti, an Italian nobleman turned ardent revolutionary, and it was he who wrote the only eyewitness account of the Conspiracy of Equals and the martyrdom of Gracchus Babeuf. Babeuf's career and the doctrine attached to his name--Babouvism--furnished inspiration and example to succeeding generations of revolutionaries, but a careful examination of Babeuf the man and Babeuf the idol will reveal certain inconsistencies between the fact and the legend. The key to these inconsistencies is Buonarroti.

CHAPTER I

THE CONSPIRACY AND THE EQUALS

Buonarroti and Babeuf

Buonarroti was the son of a noble Florentine family. He was educated for a law career at the University of Pisa, but rejected a position at the Tuscan Court to become editor of a radical newspaper. His activities in the Masonic order led to his exile, but the French Government gave him a position on Corsica where he tried, without success, to put some of the theories of Mably and Morelly¹ into practice. He was an avid supporter of Robespierre and served the Committee of Public Safety in various bureaucratic positions. He was swept by the Enlightenment visions of a perfect world, and eventually came to regard himself as divinely inspired.²

Babeuf was the son of a retired soldier, and received his only education from his father. At the age of fifteen, he went to work to help support his family, and served various noble families. By the beginning of the Revolution, he was a comparatively successful feudiste³-successful

¹This indicates some theoretical similarity between Babeuf and Buonarroti because these eighteenth century Communists influenced Babeuf also.

²Buonarroti's vision of himself as divinely inspired was a part of a detachment from reality which characterized his view of social and political realities. Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, The First Professional Revolutionary: Filippo Michele Buonarroti (1761-1837) (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 50.

³A feudiste was an investigator of feudal claims, and his activities generally centered on efforts to discover forgotten feudal obligations from which nobles could gain additional revenue.

enough to have several clerks working under him, and to have time for intellectual exercises such as the Fosseux correspondence discussed below. Nevertheless, he was deeply dissatisfied. During the Revolution, he was a radical journalist and a minor civil servant. Babeuf's dislike of the Ancien Régime was based on firsthand knowledge; he felt that he was cheated, imprisoned, and denied his "destiny" in such a society.⁴ Babeuf expressed a militancy, a more deadly aggressive character than did the more idealistic Buonarroti.

The Conspiracy of Equals

The Conspiracy of Equals (for Equality) was the attempt by a coalition of various dissident elements to overthrow the Directory and the Constitution of the Year III(1795), and return to the conditions of 1793. Most of the Conspirators became acquainted in prison during the Thermidorian Reaction, and, after their release, joined the Panthéon Club. After the Panthéon was closed by the Directory, some of its members formed a "Secret Directory" consisting of an Insurrectional Committee for constitutional and administrative matters, and a military committee for the procurement of the cooperation and assistance of the military. In addition to these two committees, the Conspiracy's membership consisted of revolutionary agents arranged in a hierarchy with each man supposedly knowing only his immediate superior and inferiors; their functions were to distribute propaganda and to organize the

⁴ Many authors, especially those unfavorable to Babeuf's objectives, placed great emphasis on this frustrated ambition. The Director Barras wrote that frustrations like these, "made to render miserable an honest soul, react doubly on an ambitious one." Since Babeuf had been hurt by society, he moved violently against it "to cross and destroy all its limits in order to appeal to nature." Memoirs of Barras, Member of the Directorate, trans. George Duruy (New York: Harper and Brothers Franklin Square, 1896), III, 133.

masses for revolt. These men referred to themselves as the "Equals" because their avowed goal was a republic based on complete equality. Among them were Babeuf and Buonarroti. This Conspiracy was doomed from its inception because the ranks of the Equals thronged with Government spies. Following their arrest in May, 1796, the Conspirators were imprisoned in the Temple for a year and then tried before a special high court at Vendôme (February 20 - May 27, 1797). Upon hearing that they had been sentenced to death, Babeuf and Augustin Alexandre Darthé, another member of the Secret Directory, stabbed themselves, but not fatally. They were hung the next day. By accepting death bravely, Babeuf aided the establishment of his place as a martyr.

Little reliable research has been done on the Conspiracy, its leaders, and its doctrines. It is generally treated as a minor plot involving disgruntled factions from the defunct Convention and a group of crude Communists. A closer examination of those involved will prove that this traditional interpretation does not present a true picture of the Conspirators or Babeuf's position among them.

CHAPTER II

COMMUNISTS AND NON-COMMUNISTS

Equals and Conventinnels

Although Buonarroti and many other authors present the Conspirators as a cohesive unit working steadfastly for one aim, this was not the actual situation. There existed no absolute categories to which one can allocate the various participants, but two general groupings are possible--the "Equals and the "Committee of the proscribed Conventionalists."⁵ The latter group centered around ex-members of the Convention, not necessarily active Terrorists, who had been excluded from power by the Thermidorian Reaction and many of whom had been denied access to the new legislative councils. They were generally more moderate than the Equals, and had formed their own Insurrectional Committee. They placed most emphasis on resurrecting the Convention, which they hoped to control, and tended to soft-pedal the social-economic revolutionary aims of the Conspiracy. An agreement was reached between the two groups to merge their efforts, but a struggle continued over policy and leadership.

Buonarroti's "Equals"

The most famous account of the events of the Conspiracy is Philippe Buonarroti's Babeuf's Conspiracy for Equality. The hero of Buonarroti's book

⁵Philippe Buonarroti, Babeuf's Conspiracy for Equality, trans. Bronterre O'Brien (Reprints of Economic Classics; New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1965), p. 110.

was Maximilien Robespierre and the central theme was the injustice and tragedy of 9 Thermidor. He began by making a distinction between the parties in the Revolution, referring to them as "the order of Egoism or the Aristocratic Society," and "that of Rousseau--the Order of Equality."⁶ The patriotic activities that he ascribed to the Order of Equality coincide exactly with the activities of Robespierre. He praised the "Equals" for their opposition to the distinction between active and passive citizens, the royal veto, and the royalists during the Constituent Assembly.⁷ He detailed the battle against the declaration of war, the Court and its ministers, and the Girondins (moderates) in the National Assembly.⁸ The events of May 31, 1793, were described as "a conspiracy for the imprescriptible rights of humanity against the desolating power of pride and avarice."⁹ He lauded the Constitution of 1793, and then defended its suspension for the installation of the Revolutionary Government (dictatorship of the Committee of Public Safety).¹⁰ Of the events of 9 Thermidor, Buonarroti declared, "From that moment all was lost," because of the assassination of those deputies "to whom the French people were mainly indebted for the vast progress made in the conquest and acquisition of their rights."¹¹

During the Thermidorian period, according to Buonarroti, these Equals were forced "underground," but never ceased to attack the government. Their activities were often continued from inside the government prisons, and it was through meetings there that they gradually achieved some semblance of organization. Buonarroti made no distinction between, or recognition of change in, the attitudes of the Equals from 1789 until the Babouvist Conspiracy

⁶Ibid., pp. 10-11. ⁷Ibid., p. 13. ⁸Ibid., p. 14.

⁹Ibid., p. 30. ¹⁰Ibid., p.25. ¹¹Ibid., pp.24-25.

of 1796. He thus claimed the Conspiracy to be an extension of the work of Robespierre. Babeuf was not mentioned until page 55, and his role was always that of an Equal, one of a group attempting to right the wrongs of 9 Thermidor. Decisions were never made by Babeuf, but by the Insurrectional Committee as a whole; it was always "the Insurrectional Committee was to demand of the people. . ."¹² Blueprints for the future were introduced by "the Insurrectional Committee was of the opinion that Society should. . .";¹³ but the phrase "Babeuf decided" never appeared. When Babeuf was mentioned, it was only as one of the group, or as a martyr to their mutual cause, and his importance appears to have been due primarily to the power of his newspaper.

Babeuf's Communism

An examination of Babeuf's own writings makes it seem improbable that he could have supported the Conspiracy which Buonarroti described. Buonarroti's version of the motives and sentiment of the Conspirators does not correspond with Babeuf's previously expressed motives and sentiments. Babeuf can most definitely be described as a Communist. Even before 1789, he was espousing ideas which could be called Communist. This pre-Revolution Communism is apparent in the correspondence between Babeuf and Dubois de Fosseux, secretary of the Academy of Arras.¹⁴ Babeuf's position during this period is made clear in an exchange of letters, during March, 1787, concerning

¹²Ibid., p. 151. ¹³Ibid., p. 180.

¹⁴In 1785, Babeuf entered an essay competition sponsored by the Academy, but his entry arrived too late for consideration by the judges. The essay was so interesting to the Academy's secretary, however, that he wrote to Babeuf. The correspondence between the two men lasted three years (1785-1788) and furnishes the most valuable source for Babeuf's pre-Revolutionary thought.

a certain pamphlet which Babeuf had sent to Fosseux for his approval and aid in obtaining publication. The pamphlet, La constitution du corps-militaire en France, dans ses rapports avec celle du Gouvernement et avec la caratère national, was alleged by Babeuf to have been written by an acquaintance, but it was probably his own work. The pamphlet, though lacking in originality of thought, was decidedly revolutionary. It severely criticized the aristocratic caste-system in the French army and advocated the convocation of an assembly of the people to which the King would be answerable and which would be the ultimate court of appeal.¹⁵ Fosseux returned the pamphlet with compliments to the author, but refused to sponsor its publication because "it was only a spirited attack on the government."¹⁶

Fosseux then asked Babeuf to submit possible propositions for the Academy's next essay competition. Babeuf responded with the following:

Given all present knowledge, what would be the state of a people whose social institutions were such that there would prevail among its individual members, with no distinctions, the most perfect equality, that the soil where they lived belonged to none but to all, that everything would be held in common, including the products of every kind of industry? Would such institutions be authorized by natural law? Would it be possible for this society to survive, or even find practicable means to effect equal distribution?¹⁷

Throughout the Revolution, Babeuf's position was always far to the left of the government. His position during the Terror could much more

¹⁵There is no published copy of this pamphlet available. The information given above is based on Ernest B. Bax, The Last Episode of the French Revolution (London: Grant Richards Limited, 1911), p.50; Victor Advielle, Histoire de Gracchus Babeuf et du Babouvisme, d'après de nombreux documents inédits (Paris: L'auteur, 1884), I, 135; David Thomson, The Babeuf Plot (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Company, Limited, 1947), p.6.

¹⁶Gracchus Babeuf, Correspondance de Babeuf avec l'Academie d'Arras, ed. Marcel Reinhard (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1961), pp. 69-70. (my translation)

¹⁷Ibid., p. 71. (my translation)

correctly be described as Hébertist (after Robespierre's left-wing opponent) than Robespierrist. This is evident from a letter of May 7, 1794, in which he bitterly denounced Robespierre for his defense of private property and castigated the Jacobins for being Robespierre's docile followers.¹⁸ Hoping for a more radical government, Babeuf supported the overthrow of Robespierre on 9 Thermidor (July 27, 1794) and began a newspaper, La Journal de la liberté de la Presse, in which he denounced him. In late 1794, he published a pamphlet, Du système de dépopulation, ou la vie et les crimes de Carrier, in which he said that Robespierre had wanted to use the guillotine to reduce the French population so that it could be more easily supplied.¹⁹

Babeuf's "Conversion"

After the publication of Du système, Babeuf broke with his friends of Thermidor, who had surrendered to the conservatives.²⁰ At this point in Babeuf's career, it would appear that the activities of Buonarroti's Equals and the activities of Gracchus Babeuf were in irreconcilable opposition. Suddenly, however, Babeuf began to praise Robespierre and took up the popular cry for the return to the Constitution of 1793. The motivation for this apparent

¹⁸Maurice Dommanget (ed.), Pages choisies de Babeuf (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1935), p. 143.

¹⁹This entire pamphlet is reprinted in Dommanget.

²⁰Babeuf's association with certain members of the Convention during the Thermidorian Reaction is one of the most obscure aspects of his career. Many authors question his sincerity and intimate that he compromised his principles for the financial support of those who led the Reaction. The most plausible explanation, however, is just that he expected the post-Thermidorian regime to be more radical than its predecessor (as it was intended to be by those who instigated the action against Robespierre). When he realized that the opposite was the case and that a period of reaction had begun, he denounced those whom he had formerly supported, especially Fréron, and was put into prison for his efforts. This is the view taken by Georges Lefebvre, The Thermidorians and the Directory, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Random House, 1964), pp. 36-37.

change is the key for understanding the relationship between the Buonarroti-Robespierrist group and the Babeuf-Hébertist group within the Conspiracy.

The most popular theory to explain this change can be called the "conversion thesis." Its proponents state simply that Babeuf saw the error of his position and realized that he had been completely wrong about Robespierre. This is the view expressed by Buonarroti and it is at this point, for him, that Babeuf becomes an Equal.²¹ Contemporary authors have given more subtle versions of this position. Claude Mazauric maintains that Babeuf was shocked by a stay in prison, by the White Terror and the rise of the jeunesse dorée, and by the collapse of morality in the post-Thermidorian period. The removal of the ashes of Marat from the Panthéon and the reinstatement of the Girondins in the Convention were the final blows. He praises Babeuf's courage in reversing his position.²²

This interpretation oversimplifies the issues involved. Babeuf's changes of opinion regarding Robespierre did not necessarily involve accepting Robespierre's political or social theories. His judgment of Robespierre changed from "diabolical" to "misguided." While still condemning what he considered the great crimes of killing republicans (Hébert), he felt that the crimes of the Thermidorians were even greater.²³ He did not change his mind about Robespierre's deeds, but about his intent: "This Robespierre is one in whom we must distinguish two persons. . . Robespierre the apostle of liberty and Robespierre the most infamous of tyrants."²⁴

²¹Buonarroti, op.cit., p. 56.

²²Claude Mazauric, Babeuf et la Conspiration pour l'égalité (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1962), p. 21.

²³Dommanget, op.cit., p. 285.

²⁴This quote appears in Bax, op.cit., p. 74.

A more practical aim is revealed in a letter to the Hébertist Joseph Bodson in which Babeuf proposed to emphasize the connection with Robespierre because Robespierreism (in contrast to Hébertism which flourished only in Paris) was a widespread sentiment in all the Republic.²⁵ Babeuf was a propagandist, and he realized the value of being identified with Robespierre because Robespierre was the most widely known symbol of the people's cause. Such identification would also enable him to capitalize on the remnants of loyalty in the ex-revolutionary Mountain and Conventionnels who were without a leader.

²⁵Dommanget, op.cit., p.285.

CHAPTER III

POWER WITHIN THE CONSPIRACY

The Conventionnels' Role

If Babeuf's "conversion" was actually just a tactical maneuver, then he was a Communist in a non-Communist conspiracy. In support of this view, the French historian Albert Mathiez, without questioning the fact of Babeuf's leadership, attempted to prove that the majority of the supporters of the Conspiracy were not Communists. He wrote that the Conspiracy was "for contemporaries, less a Communist endeavor than a last effort of the Terrorists to regain power."²⁶ He felt that most were revenge-seekers, e.g., Robert Lindet, who had acquiesced in the actions of 9 Thermidor, but was nevertheless deprived of the seat to which he was elected in the Five Hundred (new lower house). He credited others with having decided that the Committee of Public Safety had failed because they had not really attacked the crux of the social-economic problem: private property.

It was Mathiez's contention that the ex-Conventionnels and Terrorists formed the majority of Babeuf's support. He compared the list of the subscribers to Babeuf's newspaper, Le Tribun du Peuple, with a list of those who subscribed to the corresponding pro-government newspaper, L'Orateur constitutionnel ou l'ami de l'ordre et du repos public. He found that they had nearly the same number of subscribers and that these came from the

²⁶Albert Mathiez, Le Directoire du 11 brumaire an IV au 18 fructidor an IV (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1934), p. 212. (my translation)

same social classes, e.g., bankers, civil servants, judges, doctors, and military commanders. He concluded on this basis that the Tribun subscribers were those who had been made uneasy by the events of the Thermidorian period, and who sought in Babeuf's activities the chance for revenge. This group included amnestied ex-Conventionnels, and many who had been connected with Robespierre's government. Almost none were found in the west and war zones, while the heaviest concentration was in those areas subject to the White Terror. It was his contention that what pleased them most was the attacks on the Thermidorians, the glorification of their former position, and the promise of revenge; "There is no doubt that they were uninterested in the Communist doctrines; most were large land-owners, successful bourgeois who had no intention of sharing their wealth."²⁷ He concluded that Babeuf was supported despite his Communism, not because of it.

Mathiez's conclusion has several flaws. It is not possible to judge the membership of the Conspiracy by the list of subscribers to Le Tribun. Babeuf's newspaper was printed in large numbers and distributed free of charge in the workingmen's districts. There were also numerous placards, handbills, and similar items, distributed in these areas, for it was their support which Babeuf was seeking. The list of subscribers furnishes no real evaluation of how effective Babeuf's propaganda was among the people whom he was most conscientiously trying to influence. These subscribers were probably of importance as a source of some income, but could not have furnished nearly enough to give them controlling power. They were located in the provinces, while the Conspiracy was a Parisian affair. Also, there is not direct proof to support Mathiez's equation of one who read Babeuf's newspaper with one who knew of and supported the Conspiracy. What Mathiez's research does

²⁷Ibid., pp. 191-196. (my translation)

illustrate is that there existed a body of ex-Conventionnels and civil servants who, for whatever reason, were interested in Babeuf's activities. There is little evidence as to how influential this group was, but they must have been strong enough to force the Equals to compromise to obtain their cooperation. Judged by the amount of space that it is given in Buonarroti, this alliance was a major fact of the Conspiracy.

Babeuf's Role

A more precise indication of Babeuf's position within the Secret Directory itself is in its refusal to sanction the publication of the "Manifesto of Equals", written by Sylvain Maréchal, but expressing to Babeuf's satisfaction the principles of the Conspiracy.²⁸ Buonarroti explained this denial of sanction as a result of general disapproval of certain expressions, chiefly the phrase "perish if it must be, all the arts, provided the real equality be left to us."²⁹ But this reason seems insufficient since a few phrases could easily have been deleted or changed. This concern with the future of the arts is also in contrast to the tone of other portions of Buonarroti's book, where he expresses agreement with Rousseau's statement that, "Never were morality and liberty found united with a brilliant state of the arts and sciences."³⁰

Instead of the "Manifesto", the Secret Directory published "Analysis of the Doctrine of Babeuf, tribune of the People, prescribed by the executive Directory for having told the truth." A comparison of the two documents

²⁸Sylvain Maréchal was an extreme radical from the beginning of the Revolution and was one of the original members of the Secret Directory. He was an unsuccessful poet, an avowed atheist, and a personal friend of Babeuf's.

²⁹Buonarroti, op.cit., p. 315.

³⁰Ibid., p. 211.

reveals several important differences. The only mention of the Constitution of 1793 in the "Manifesto" was as a "great step indeed towards real equality, and never before had it been approached so closely; but yet, it did not achieve the aim and did not touch the common well-being."³¹ Almost half of the "Analysis" was devoted to praise of the Constitution of 1793, to condemnation of the Constitution of the Year III, and to the command that "Every citizen is bound to re-establish and to defend the Constitution of 1793--the will and the well-being of the people."³² The "Manifesto" was a spirited proclamation of "the common good, or this community of goods. No more individual property in land; the land belongs to no one."³³ The "Analysis" made no mention of property rights, and contained only a mild denunciation of the rich.³⁴ It is the "Manifesto" which most closely resembled Babeuf's own views as presented in the Tribun, but it was the "Analysis" which was formally endorsed. Although there is little information about what happened, this would seem to indicate that Babeuf was not dictating the policy decisions.

³¹Ibid., p. 317.

³²Ibid., p. 326.

³³Ibid., p. 315.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 324-325.

CHAPTER IV

BABEUF IN HISTORY

Buonarroti's Babeuf

All the above information proves that the Conspirators were not a homogeneous group, and that Babeuf was not necessarily the guiding spirit. The Conspiracy obviously failed to achieve its goal, but this does not mean that Babeuf has no importance except as a member of a minor conspiracy.

It is ironic that Babeuf, who sought to capitalize on the sentiment remaining for Robespierre, achieved his greatest fame as one martyred in an attempt to return to 1793. Babeuf made no theoretical contribution to Communist thought³⁵ but he is often credited with originating the organizational pattern of a revolutionary elite arranged in a hierarchy where one knew only his immediate superiors and inferiors, and a revolutionary dictatorship to re-educate the masses and prepare them for the new society.³⁶ This pattern was copied by nineteenth century revolutionary leaders, such as Auguste Blanqui, to whom Babeuf was a heroic symbol. It is questionable how much of their adoration derived from their admiration of the man and his ideas and how much from the desire to use him--as a martyr--much in the way that Babeuf had sought to use Robespierre.³⁷ Babeuf was the hero, but

³⁵I could find no author who furnished any reliable account of any originality in Babeuf's Communism.

³⁶This is the importance attributed to Babeuf by Max Nomad, Apostles of Revolution (rev. ed.; New York: Collier Books, 1961), p. 30.

³⁷Ibid., p. 26.

Buonarroti's book was the Bible, and Buonarroti was the inspired apostle;³⁸ the influence of the "real" Babeuf seems almost non-existent. As for the organizational pattern, it was built on previous revolutionary experience, and was not necessarily the work solely of Babeuf, but of the whole group; it too was transmitted through Buonarroti.

Buonarroti was the vehicle through which most impressions of Babeuf were transmitted. Buonarroti was a vital magnetic personality, capable of inspiring great affection. He was warm, likeable, well-educated and cultivated. He was completely dedicated and saw himself as a stainless knight. His total self-confidence was built on a narrow and unyielding faith in Rousseau, Robespierre, and the First Republic. After the July Revolution of 1830, he returned to Paris and, until his death in 1837, was a living hero to the revolutionary movement.³⁹ The Conspiracy had a stunning impact on revolutionary opinion. Part of this success was probably due to Buonarroti himself and to the timing of the publication. It furnished an exciting hope for a better world almost achieved in 1793-93, and still possible through political conspiracy. The striking contrast between life in Restoration and Orleanist France and the Spartan Republic of Equals portrayed by Buonarroti made the Republic seem a Utopia to those who felt excluded or frustrated by their society. France was beginning to really feel the effects of the Industrial Revolution and this, combined with the conservative middle-class rule, turned large sections of industrial workers to thoughts of socialism. In 1834, the republican societies were made illegal and went underground, and, in 1835, laws placed strenuous

³⁸ John Plamenatz, The Revolutionary Movement in France 1815-71 (London: Longman's Green, and Company, 1952), pp. 45-47.

³⁹ Eisenstein, op.cit., pp. 68-69.

restrictions on the Press. This strengthened those proponents of secret conspiracy like Buonarroti.⁴⁰ The center of all this activity was Buonarroti and any real influence was his.

Babeuf was useful because he died well, and under the proper circumstances. He became a propaganda tool for Buonarroti. Because Babeuf was dead, Buonarroti merely chose those aspects of his thought which fitted the image that Buonarroti wished to portray. Anything which did not fit the Robespierriest image was omitted. This may be seen in his handling of a series of decrees which Babeuf wrote as a projected constitution for the eventual Communist state. In his "Justification Pieces" Buonarroti included excerpts of these decrees, but omitted the following sections which are of key importance in Babeuf's theoretical state:

Article I: A great national community of goods shall be established in the Republic.

Article III: The right of inheritance is abolished and all property at present belonging to private persons on their death falls to the national community of goods.

Article X: The Republic invites all its citizens, by the voluntary surrender of their possessions to the community, to contribute to the success of this reform.⁴¹

This omission reveals not Buonarroti's opposition to Babeuf's principles, but his assessment of their priority relative to other aspects of the Conspiracy. Babeuf's emphasis fell always on the society to be created, with the Constitution of 1793 as a useful starting point because it existed and had some measure of support from the people. Buonarroti's emphasis fell on returning to 1793, and his plans for the future were much more vague and shadowy and of less importance than the return itself.

⁴⁰Thomson, op.cit., p. 63.

⁴¹This entire series of decrees is reprinted in Bax, op.cit., pp. 73-76.

Babeuf's Importance

Yet, Babeuf's martyrdom should be considered his success, for the martyr's role was one which he envisioned for himself. While awaiting trial, he wrote to his fellow Conspirator Felix Lepelletier, "Gracchus Babeuf was never ambitious for himself or for his family; he wanted only to advance the welfare of the People; his greatest reward would be to have his children become good and honest artisans in the classes that society always needs."⁴² The nucleus of his defense before the High Court of Vendôme was that he was the defender of the real principles of the Revolution:

If our death is decreed; if the fatal clock has sounded for me; if my last hour is fixed at this moment in the book of destiny, I have been awaiting this moment for a long time. Nearly a perpetual victim of my love for the People since the first year of the Revolution; acquainted with the dungeons; familiar with the thought of torture, of violent death, which are nearly always the lot of the revolutionaries, this event does not amaze me! Nothing frightens me! It is good to have one's name inscribed on the column of victims for the love of the People! I am sure that mine will be there! So, Gracchus Babeuf is very happy to be punished for Virtue!!!⁴³

Just before his execution, he wrote to his wife that "far from being dishonourable, such a death is most glorious."⁴⁴

If it is ironic that Babeuf died as a Robespierrist martyr, then it is even more ironic that his association with Buonarroti and the Robespierrists resulted in his immortalization as a Communist martyr. Babeuf tried to use Buonarroti and the Robespierrists, but was, in death,

⁴²Dommanget, op. cit., p. 318. (my translation)

⁴³Advielle, op. cit., p. 320. (my translation)

⁴⁴Buonarroti, op. cit., p. 438.

used by them as a martyr to a cause in which he did not believe. But, with time, he and many Robespierrist martyrs were adopted as heroes of a new more militant socialism, closer to his ideas than to Robespierre's. Thus, in the end, Babeuf was triumphant, for he did become a martyr for Communism.

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